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Close-Up, Government's Lots of Fun

By LYN MARTIN

There's no blackboard, and for the day's lesson you might watch President Carter greet the prime minister of Japan or find yourself tossing some tough questions to the President's lawyer.

That's what government class was like for 1,000 Atlanta high school students and teachers who elected to throw out the "cookbook theory" of education—for one week, anyway—and become eyewitnesses to the making of history.

"The cookbook theory is where students sit and memorize all the recipes in a book," said Steve Janger, director of a program called Close-Up. "At the end of the year, the teacher asks him to write down the recipe for eggs benedict. So he does. Great. Has he really learned how to cook it?"

"In Close-Up, we get the kids into the kitchen."

Here's how Close-Up, a \$4.5 million federal program, works:

Students and teachers from high schools across the country travel to Washington, D.C., for a one-week visit at a cost of \$295 per student plus air fare.

Instead of only making the traditional sightseeing trips and visiting briefly with their senators and congressmen, the students attend seminars, committee meetings and discuss current issues with top governmental figures.

This year, Georgia students and teachers, who came from high schools as far north as Rome, Ga., and as far west as the Alabama border, were able to:

- Listen to Adm. Stansfield Turner, head of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), testify on whether the CIA budget should be made public.

- Witness President Carter welcoming Japan's Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda to the United States amid a 17-gun salute.

- Direct questions to Georgia congressmen Elliott Levitas, Larry McDonald and John Flynt, and to senators Herman Talmadge and Sam Nunn, to name a few.

"And they're not questions like, 'What do you do when you get to work in the morning?'" said Janger. "They're gut-level questions that catch some speakers by surprise."

A sampling of the inquiries Georgia high school students made in Washington this year:

"Do you think President Carter's human rights policy will affect the SALT talks?"

"Why did you accept your salary increase? Do you feel like it takes \$56,000 to live in Washington these days?"

"Is the B1 bomber a proper utilization of our funds when compared to our domestic needs today?"

Robert J. Lipshutz, counsel to the President, is one speaker who candidly admitted that when questioned by the high school students, "Every once in a while, I had to answer I don't know."

"They gave me just as tough questions as I've ever gotten from adult groups," Lipshutz said. "They had given a lot of thought to issues. This (program) is more than just tourism. They get some real in-depth exposure."

David Willard, an Atlanta Southwest High School teacher and the area administrator for Close-Up, accompanied a group from his high school to Washington last week.

"It was really exciting for them to be a part of everything going on," he said. "They'd go to a committee meeting and watch Admiral Turner testify and then see it on TV that night."

The aim of the program is participation in government.

"We don't want just the student council president or the merit scholar," Janger said. "He's already a leader. We want the student who hasn't made it as a leader, who's never been away from Atlanta or never been on a plane."

"It's both an educational and social experience. Kids who live in the same community, who probably would never talk to each other, come together to learn," he said.

And so do their teachers. Doug Di Julio, Close-Up coordinator, explained, "The teachers are not on the trip to be chaperons. They're there to participate, side by side, with the students."

The teachers and students start their typical day in Washington at 6:30 a.m.

After breakfast, they attend seminars, participate in question-and-answer periods, observe House and Senate proceedings, attend committee meetings, visit federal department heads and attend more workshops.

In the evenings, the workings of the government may be interrupted long enough for a play at the Ford or Kennedy Centers, a giant pizza party, or a special banquet.

By the end of the week-long experience, if Close-Up has done its job, students and teachers will both leave Washington with the "I count" feeling.

"We don't want them to feel like things are so big in the United States that the individual voice is lost," Janger said. "We hope the opportunity they've had to have direct dialogue

with senators and congressmen and even the President has sent them home with the sense that someone is listening to them."

Close-Up is not necessarily trying to convert students and teachers to political activism.

"They always say they will become active in politics, and some do," said Willard. "But whether they do or not, they become aware of government and how it works."

Every high school student at the sophomore level and above in an 18-county metro Atlanta area is eligible to participate in the Close-Up program.

This year Close-Up provided \$45,000, which was matched by an anonymous Atlanta donor, for fellowships for needy students who could not afford to pay the fee for the program.

"We want every student from every socio-economic level to have the opportunity to see their government at work," Janger said.